

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Sreeja Kodali and I am a 4th year Yale medical student in New Haven and am also a member of the HAVEN Free Clinic. I strongly support HB 6616: "An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status".

I have lived in New Haven, Connecticut for nearly nine years and in the last five years I have been intermittently involved with HAVEN Free Clinic, navigating the complex process of securing specialty care for uninsured patients, tackling bills from debt collectors that uninsured patients face for receiving necessary healthcare, and providing medical care to uninsured patients. As a medical student over the past four years, I've cared for uninsured patients across the lifespan in the office and hospital.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to expand HUSKY access to patients regardless of immigration status. It is so routine to witness how a lack of health insurance detrimentally affects patient care and people's health. Patients show up sicker to the hospital with preventable problems because they are unable to access routine primary care. Providers are unable to prescribe required treatment because of costs or are compelled to prescribe substandard but more cost-friendly alternatives.

My own parents immigrated from India over thirty years ago in search of new educational and job opportunities, like many other immigrant families. Over the years, my family members have developed major health problems, and having health insurance allowed us to focus on their health, treatment, and the emotional toll illness brings on a family without the added stressor of costs. This is not a privilege many of my immigrant patients have.

In the hospital, I recently cared for a 20-year-old uninsured, immigrant patient. He studied psychology in college and came to the United States in search of new job opportunities with a hope to eventually return to school. He was mild-mannered and polite; he'd probably remind many of you of your own sons. He tearfully recounted his history of physical abuse, and how he turned to substances to cope and developed an addiction. He came to the hospital due to an accidental overdose because his substance was contaminated with fentanyl, and he required the highest level of care the hospital could offer to support his lungs. Although he would have greatly benefited from numerous substance use treatment referral options, his lack of insurance prevented him from accessing any of these resources. We discharged him home with very limited treatment options for his addiction, at persisting significant risk for overdose and death. If this bill passed, patients like him would be eligible for HUSKY and could receive life-saving care.

In summary, I strongly support HB 6616 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation out of committee in its current form to expand HUSKY access to age 26. What a privilege it is for all of us to be gathered here with the potential to improve the health of our community, to improve the health of our neighbors and youth, and to quite literally save lives.

Our work must continue this year by expanding HUSKY access up to age 26 and in the future I hope the committee works toward opening HUSKY access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,

Sreeja Kodali
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